

The Jews: Revisiting Mahatma Gandhi's November 1938 Article

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Abstract

'Palestine belongs to the Arabs in the same sense that England belongs to the English or France to the French.' This remark made in November 1938 has been the most widely statement of Mahatma Gandhi on foreign policy, especially on Israel, Palestine and wider Middle East/West Asia. This was seen as the epitome of Gandhi's 'consistent' opposition to the formation of a Jewish national home in Palestine. However, a closer reading of the article published in the 26 November issue of *Harijan* presents a more complex picture and depicts Gandhi's unfamiliarity with Judaism and his limited understanding of Zionism. Furthermore, while demanding Jewish non-violence even against Hitler, he was accommodative of Arab violence in Palestine.

Keywords

Mahatma Gandhi, Palestine, Jews, Zionism, Hitler, Non-violence, Jewish National Home

Introduction

'Palestine belongs to the Arabs in the same sense that England belongs to the English or France to the French.' This November 1938 remark has been the most widely quoted statement of Mahatma Gandhi on foreign policy (CWMG, vol.68, pp. 137–141). Indeed, it is impossible to have any scholarly discussion on India's policy towards Israel, Palestine, Arab–Israeli conflict or the wider West-Asian region without this. Gandhi's observation figures prominently in the works of

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Professor M. S. Agwani, the doyen of the region in the country (Agwani, 1971, p. 448; 1973, p. 54; 1976, p. 68). The statement has become an obligatory reference for political leaders and can be noticed even after the normalization of relations with Israel (MEA, 2014, 2015; Mukherjee, 2007). The same is true for *The Domestic Roots of India's Foreign Policy*, a seminal work by A. Appadorai (1981, p. 149) as well as in the writings of Aijaz Ahmad (2014, p. 184), A. K. Ramakrishnan (2014, p. 37), Bansidhar Pradhan (2004, p. 5), Shamir Hasan (2008, p. 100) and others (Jansen, 1971; India, MEA (n.d); A Student of West Asian Studies, N.D.; Jansen, 1971; Heptullah, 1991; Hariharan, 2014; Falerio 2015).

Likewise, many former diplomats cite Gandhi without even trying to link the 1938 statement with the post-1992 Indo-Israeli bonhomie (Abhyankar, 2007, p. 324; Sikri, 2009, p. 144). Even the communists who criticized Mahatma Gandhi for being a 'bourgeoisie agent' do not hesitate to seek refuge under his 1938 remake (People's Democracy, 2004; Prashad, 2003, p. 12). Critics of the Indo-Israeli relations often flag Gandhi either to question normalization of relations or criticize the pace (Aiyar, 1993; Chakravorti, 2008; Dasgupta, 1992; G. Gandhi, 2017; R. Gandhi, 2017; Varadarajan, 2005). International scholars also cite Gandhi to explain the prolonged absence of diplomatic relations between the two countries (Abadi, 2004; Blarel, 2014; Shimoni, 1977; Ward, 1992).

Despite such an extensive citation, not many questioned or challenged some of Gandhi's assumptions, observations and understanding. For long, to explain, justify and rationalize the absence of relations with Israel, scholars often used Gandhi. If India's recognition came in September 1950, normalization had to wait until January 1992. Hence, the recognition-without-relations policy was depicted as Gandhian: moral and principled. Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's decision to establish full diplomatic relations in the wake of the end of the Cold War and Madrid Peace Conference, should have transformed this trend. This, however, was the case and Indian leaders, diplomats, scholars and the intelligentsia continue to cite Gandhi's 1938 statement as if nothing has changed. If non-relation with Israel was 'Gandhian', then normalization naturally becomes unGandhian. While squaring this circle is a challenge, a modest attempt is made here to closely examine Gandhi's article on *The Jews* published in the 26 November 1938 issue of *Harijan*. Actual quotes from the article are in *italics*, and for clarity and continuity, the entire article is reproduced at the end.

The Context

Gandhi's forays into the Arab-Jewish conflict began during the Khilafat phase when he located Palestine within the context of *Jazirat-ul-Arab*. Meaning the island of Arabia, it denotes the Arabian Peninsula and comprises of present-day Saudi Arabia and its neighbours on the Western shores of the Persian Gulf. However, in the 1920s, the leaders of the Khilafat movement adopted a far wider canvas for it and according to noted historian Mushirul Hasan, *Jazirat-ul-Arab* included 'Constantinople, Jerusalem, Medina and, above all, Mecca with its

Baitullah, the focal point of daily prayers and the annual haj' (Hasan, 1994, pp. 112–113). Neither the Ottoman Empire nor the Turkish Republic would be enamoured by the inclusion of Constantinople in the Arabian Peninsula. However, this was how the territorial limits of *Jazirat-ul-Arab* were defined and understood in the country in the early twentieth century, especially during the Khilafat phase.

Enticing the Congress party to join the pan-Islamist cause, Gandhi framed Palestine within *Jazirat-ul-Arab* and became the first Indian leader to reject the British promise of a Jewish national home as outlined in the Balfour Declaration. Using Islamic framing, motifs, history and 'injunctions' of Prophet Mohammed, Mahatma Gandhi declared that Britain could not hand over Palestine to non-Muslim control let alone sovereignty (CWMG, 19, p. 530).

Since meeting his Jewish friend from the South African days Hermann Kallenbach in May 1937, after a gap of 23 years, Gandhi sought to mediate the Palestine problem and before Kallenbach headed for Palestine, Gandhi handed him an undated and unsigned statement on Zionism for transmission to the Jewish Agency for Palestine. There were communications between the two after Kallenbach met Zionist leaders in London in early 1937 but a host of domestic and regional factors prevented Gandhi from mediating the Arab–Jewish tension and resulted in Gandhi's *Harijan* article. According to Simone Panter-Brick, the immediate provocation for the article 'arose from events of 9th and 10th November. The Woodhead Commission published its report on the 9th. Ataturk died on 10th and in the night of the 9th–10th pogrom organized against German Jews and Jewish property, devastated their community' (Panter-Brick, 2008, p. 110). While she maintained that Gandhi wrote the article on 11th, the latter had given 20 November as the date and the article was published in the 26 November issue of the *Harijan*. Pyarelal's account of Gandhi's visit to the frontier province was the lead article and was followed by *The Jews*. Materials currently available indicate that Gandhi wrote this without any 'consultations' with Kallenbach.

The Article

For nearly a decade after the disastrous Khilafat movement, Gandhi refrained from making any public statement or private remarks on Palestine. If the Turkish Republic abolished the thirteenth-century-old institution, the Hindu–Muslim unity—the purpose for which Gandhi plunged in the Congress party into the pan-Islamic struggle—collapsed within the country. His meeting with Kallenbach in May 1937 after a gap of 23 years changed that and led to his private statement referred earlier.

Gandhi did not write the *Harijan* article on his own volition and he begins with the following remark: *Several letters have been received by me asking to declare my views about the Arab–Jew question in Palestine and the persecution of the Jews in Germany*. Gandhi does not reveal the identity of his interlocutors but currently available materials indicate that since the mid-1930s, the Zionist leadership was seeking Gandhi's support and endorsement for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. From his reference, it is not clear if his interlocutors sought

a link between the events in Germany and Palestine or he decided to combine the two. The rise of Hitler spurred the exodus of Jews out of Germany and one such person was Martin Buber (1939) who admired Gandhi but rebuked Gandhi's *Harijan* article a few weeks after its publication. Zionism predates the ascendance of Hitler but the Jewish tragedy in Europe subsequently galvanized Western support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

Gandhi was aware that he was entering a quagmire. The clarity he had during the Khilafat phase over the Ottoman–British tussle was no longer there. Driven by his desire to forge the Hindu–Muslim unity, he framed Palestine within the Islamic motif, in the 1920s argued it was an integral part of *Jazirat-ul-Arab* and hence should remain in perpetuity under Islamic rule. Things were more complicated now, especially in the light of Kallenbach's transition from being a non-practicing Jew to a committed Zionist. Hence, admitting that it was a *very difficult question*, Gandhi reminds his audience that it was *not without hesitation that I venture to offer my views*.

Before delivering a devastating blow, he established his friendly credentials and says, *My sympathies are all with the Jews*. As would be discussed, he viewed 'Jews' merely as a religious community and not as a distinct national group. This was partly due to his limited understanding of Judaism but largely due to the evolving Congress position regarding Mohammed Ali Jinnah's claims of Indian Muslims being a separate and distinguishable nation because they follow a different religion. He reminds that *I have known them intimately in South Africa. Some of them became life-long companions*. This primarily refers to Kallenbach and H. S. L. Polak; if he established his Tolstoy Farm in the land belonging to the former (CWMG, 12, p. 526), the latter travelled to India twice, to brief the Indian national leaders of Gandhi's political accomplishments in South Africa, especially his non-violent political struggle in defines of the indentured Indian workers (CWMG, 9, pp. 274–275). Gandhi remained in contact with both of them long after he returned to India in early 1915.

Through these friends, Gandhi adds, *I came to learn much of their age-long persecution*. For the benefit of his readers, he offers a closer example. *They have been the untouchables of Christianity*. He often referred the Jews as 'untouchables of Christianity' and observes that the *parallel between their treatment by Christians and the treatment of untouchables by Hindus is very close*. In both these cases, *Religious sanction has been invoked to justify the inhuman treatment meted out to them*. Interestingly, his remedy was different. In the Indian case, he repeatedly urged the Hindus to reflect on their prejudices and abandon their dehumanized and humiliating treatment of the other but in the case of Jews, he chose to blame the victims. He was less forceful in demanding the Christians to abandon their prejudices towards the Jews and treat them as equals. Indeed, weeks after the *Harijan* article, he invoked the centuries-old arguments of Jews being responsible for the crucifixion of Christ (CWMG, 68, p. 191).

Apart from his long association, he adds, *there is the more common universal reason for my sympathy for the Jews*. Despite being a microscopic community in India, he periodically referred to Jews in his public statements, speeches or prayers. He mentions Jews more often than Sikhs and Buddhists whose population in India

has been larger and references to Jews can be found in almost all the issues of the 100-volume *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. Such favourable references to Jews, however, appear to be a left-handed compliment before he delivers a devastating blow to Zionism.

In the third paragraph of the article, he claims that his *sympathy does not blind me to the requirements of justice*. In the following sentence, he dismissed that the *cry for the national home for the Jews does not make much appeal to me*. This highlights Gandhi's unfamiliarity with Zionism and its response to the diasporic life. Gandhi's opposition was not to its location but to the very idea of a Jewish homeland. This comes primarily from his refusal to recognize the transition of Jews from being a religious community to a national group. Even while recognizing and admitting the Christian treatment of the Jews, Gandhi was not convinced of the idea of a homeland.

Gandhi was less affected by the cause of justice of another community in the region. His response to the fate of Armenians in the closing stage of the First World War was anything but sensitive. Reflecting the prevailing mood of the Khilafat movement, he was not prepared to criticize the Ottomans for the treatment of its Armenian population and on the contrary, he chose to fault the victims and argued that describing the Armenians as 'a noble, excellent, industrious and gentle race' exhibits 'the extent of ... ignorance about the question' (CWMG, 21, p. 69). The Palestine issue was a lot simpler one than the Armenians question. Both cases involved oppression cases; in Palestine, the Muslims were oppressed by the Christian British and in the other, Ottoman Muslims were the oppressing part. Besides the geographical distance, criticizing the Ottomans over the Armenians would have diluted the Khilafat movement. Hence, Gandhi settled siding with the Ottomans over the Armenian issue.

This has to be viewed within the Indian domestic context. Since the return to the Muslim League and his re-election as president in March 1934, Jinnah was projecting the Muslim as a distinct nation and the League as its exclusive representative. As he wrote to 'Mr Gandhi' in March 1938, the League would represent the Muslims while the Congress would represent the majority Hindus or all the non-Muslim population of British India. In short, as a follower of a different religion, Jinnah argued, Indian Muslims constitute a different nation and this was gaining wider appeal in the late 1930s. Indeed, Gandhi could no longer claim to represent or speak on behalf of the entire nationalist movement but only for those represented by the Congress.

Accepting the Zionist claims of Jews being nation would imply that the Jinnah's Muslims would also be a distinct national group. Conversely, accepting the Zionist arguments in Palestine while opposing the League's claims would erode the Muslim support for the Congress party. Thus, Gandhi and indeed the entire Congress leadership, adopted an identical position vis-à-vis the League and Zionist, namely, religion does not constitute nationhood.

The conditions of the Muslims of British India and the Jews in the diaspora were different and incomparable. One was indigenous residing in a territorially contiguous area and decade after Gandhi's *Harijan* article, a large portion of them

choose to stay behind in India out of choice. The other were scattered and the Jewish life in both Christian Europe and Islamic Middle East has been anything but flattering (Lewis, 1984). Gandhi, however, was more concerned about the ramifications of recognizing religion-based nationalism than about the nuanced differences between the League's Muslims and the Zionists. His prolonged viewing of Jews mere as a religious and not a national community did not make things easier.

As he views Zionism as a religious movement, he faulted that the sanction for a homeland was *sought in the Bible* and that Jews have tenuously *hankered after return to Palestine*. Despite its devastating effects upon the Palestinians, Zionism was anything but a religious movement or a messianic cult. The principal figures of Zionism, namely Theodore Herzl—the founder of modern political Zionism, Chaim Weizmann—the architect of the Balfour Declaration—and David Ben-Gurion, the first Prime Minister of State of Israel, were non-practicing Jews and they did not aspire for a theocratic state. As one critic reminded Gandhi, Zionists ‘do not open the Bible’ to legitimize their claims (Magnes, 1939). On the contrary, during the Khilafat phase, Gandhi periodically used the ‘injunctions’ of Prophet Mohammed to argue that Palestine must remain under perpetual Islamic control and sovereignty.

Then, Gandhi posed a firm challenge to Zionism and asked: *Why should they not, like other peoples of the earth, make that country their home where they are born and where they earn their livelihood?* As he wrote these lines, war clouds were hovering over Europe and since the ascendance of Hitler in 1933, Germany was adopting a xenophobic policy towards its non-Aryan, especially Jewish, population. Even before the Nazi aggression, some countries in Central and Eastern Europe had been differentiating their Jewish population and enforcing restrictions regarding dress, occupation, residence and other social arena. As Panter-Brick observed, Gandhi wrote this article days after the *Kristallnacht*, the Night of the Broken Glass where scores of Nazi youth backed by the Gestapo vandalized Jewish properties, desecrated synagogues, burnt books of Jewish authors and attacked Jewish citizens in different parts of Germany. Overnight, the centuries of Jewish life was ruined and people were alienated. Rather than taking the Christian Europe to task for its barbaric treatment of the Jews, Gandhi demanded the latter to seek ‘normalcy’ in places where *they are born and where they earn their livelihood*. Such a question in post-riot locations in India would have been insensitive and would have evoked rebuke and ridicule.

Then, Gandhi delivers a fatal blow to the demand for a favourable statement on Zionism and declares, *Palestine belongs to the Arabs in the same sense that England belongs to the English or France to the French*. This is his most widely cited statement on foreign policy especially, vis-à-vis, Israel, Palestine or the wider West Asia. As discussed earlier, it is impossible to locate any scholarly work without this remark. Many used to explain India's support for the Palestinians or to rationalize the prolonged absence of diplomatic relations with Israel. If the Indian academics failed to critically examine this statement, retired diplomats avoided linking this statement of Gandhi with Rao's decision to normalize relations

in January 1992. For long, this statement was sufficient to provide a moral and ethical dimension to India's foreign policy. Foreign scholars used this to explain India's latent unfriendliness towards Jewish nationalism.

Writing days after *Kristallnacht*, Gandhi could not have written, *in the same sense Germany belongs to the Germans*. That would have been preposterous and hence he settled for England and France. The former was the midwife of the homeland project through the Balfour Declaration and the latter was the birth-place of political Zionism. Secular and largely agnostic Herzl heard 'Death to the Jews' in the Parisian courtroom.

Gandhi's opposition to a Jewish homeland per se referred earlier tuned into moral indignation over its territorial location, namely, Palestine and he felt, *It is wrong and inhuman to impose the Jews on the Arabs*. This accurately captured the sociopolitical consequences of a Jewish national home in Palestine. When the emigration of Jewish pioneers began in 1882, Palestine was not an empty land and even at the time of the Balfour Declaration, the Jews constituted less than five per cent of the population of Palestine. A Zionist homeland meant 'imposing' *the Jews on the Arabs* and therefore, *What is going on in Palestine today cannot be justified by any moral code of conduct*. Gandhi was reacting to the demographic transformation, which was a precondition for a Jewish homeland.

Then Gandhi moved to challenge British *locus standi* in seeking to 'facilitate' a Jewish homeland in Palestine and observed, *The mandates have no sanction but that of the last war*. This has been Gandhi's position since the early 1920s. Shortly after the Balfour Declaration, he observed 'Muslim soldiers did not shed their blood in the last war for the purpose of surrendering Palestine out of Muslim control' (CWMG, 19, p. 530). He went to suggest that *it would be a crime against humanity to reduce the proud Arabs so that Palestine can be restored to the Jews partly or wholly as their national home*. It was obvious that the British legitimacy over Palestine came through its conquest during the closing stage of the First World War. The army led by Gen. Edmund Henry Allenby (1861–1936) entered the City of Jerusalem on 11 December 1917 but the Balfour Declaration was issued five weeks before, that is, even before Palestine came under British control.

However, Gandhi's criticisms over 'territorial conquest' being the sole British claim to endorse Jewish homeland in Palestine are problematic. If conquest alone was the British source of legitimacy, then it becomes pertinent to ask: how did Jerusalem become Arab and Islamic? The armies led by Second Caliph Umer laid a siege of the city in late 636 AD, captured it in April, the following year, and the prayer hall that Umer built gradually became the al-Aqsa mosque, the third holiest site in Islam. In other words, Gandhi's criticism vis-à-vis the British 'conquest' was equally valid for the Arab-Islamic conquest of the City. However, as Panter-Brick reminds, Gandhi adopts a timeframe that was 'favourable' to the Muslims (Panter-Brick, 2008, p. 115).

Then Gandhi moves to suggesting an alternative to Zionism and in his view, *The nobler course would be to insist on a just treatment of the Jews wherever they are born and bred*. Then he adds- *The Jews born in France are French in precisely the same sense that Christians born in France are French*. Had this been the reality, Zionism would have remained as a marginal cult rather than being a move-

ment that transformed the Jewish diaspora. Gandhi's counsel was addressed to the victims, not to the governments and societies of the host countries. His selection of France as an example is curious, as the German example in November 1938 would have exposed the harsh reality. Had he written, *The Jews born in Germany are Germans in precisely the same sense that Christians born in Germany are German*, Gandhi would have realized the hollowness of his arguments.

Therein lays Gandhi's selection of examples. As he was writing these lines, a number of countries in Western Europe began imposing specific dress codes and other forms of social restrictions upon their Jewish citizens, thereby challenging his notion of Jews being on par with the Christian citizens. The Europe of the late 1930s was far from egalitarian but xenophobic, especially when it was becoming the social norm and official policy against the Jews. Rather than demanding the states to treat all its citizens on par, Gandhi was counselling the Jews to see themselves as 'full citizens'.

Not satisfied with an advice not rooted in European politics of that time, he rhetorically asks, *If the Jews have no home but Palestine, will they relish the idea of being forced to leave the other parts of the world in which they are settled? Or do they want a double home where they can remain at will?* Indeed, Britain faced this challenge during the run-up to the Balfour Declaration and there were fears of double loyalty of the Jews subjects of the Empire. Largely to assuage the concerns, it declared that the British support for a Jewish national home in Palestine would not affect 'the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country'.

As some of his critics argued (Panter-Brick, 2008, p. 117), was Gandhi demanding the same when he was fighting for the rights of the Indians in South Africa and other parts of the world? As later events proved, the same argument could be made for Jinnah's demand for a Muslim homeland in the Indian subcontinent. Though a large number of them left for Pakistan, considerable number of Muslims opted to stay with the Congress party and its option for an inclusive India. Hence, Gandhi's arguments for Jews wanting 'a double home' are equally valid for League's demand for a Muslim homeland in the post-British India. Scholars who cite him do not see repercussions of Gandhi's 'double home' argument.

Then he makes a false and one might say a blasphemous link between the 'double home' and their fate in Germany and writes, *This cry for the national home affords a colourable justification for the German expulsion of the Jews*. Nothing could be farther from the truth, the core and unique feature that differentiated Gandhi from other political figures of his time. The later part of the sentence indicates Gandhi was aware of the German expulsion of the Jews even before the outbreak of the Second World War but he attributed it to the Jewish aspirations for a 'double home'. Either he was unfamiliar with the Nazi ideology or making a false link. Xenophobia, racial profiling and supremacy were the moving spirit behind the Nazi treatment of the Jews and not the Balfour Declaration. Rather it was Gandhi, who offers a 'colourable justification' and the link between the anti-Jewish activities of the Nazi Germany and Balfour Declaration and not the German leadership.

At the same time, Gandhi was aware and was prepared to recognize the German attitude towards the Jews and used some of the harshest remarks to describe it. In his view, *the German persecution of the Jews seems to have no parallel in history*.

His intuition was profound and felt *tyrants of old never went so mad as Hitler seems to have gone*. A few months later, addressing him as 'Dear Friend', he wrote to the Fuhrer in December 1940 and reminding Hitler of his 'humiliation of Czechoslovakia, the rape of Poland and the swallowing of Denmark' (CWMG, 73, pp. 253–254). However, he made no direct appeal to Hitler on behalf of Jews or their plight under the Nazis.

According to Gandhi, *Hitler is propounding a new religion of exclusive and militant nationalism in the name of which any inhumanity becomes an act of humanity to be rewarded here and hereafter. The crime of an obviously mad and intrepid youth is being visited upon his whole race with unbelievable ferocity*. This was well before the commencement of the Second World War but shortly after the Evan Conference of July 1938 where some Western European countries met and discussed the plight of the Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi persecution in Germany. However, the worst was yet to come.

Unfortunately, these harsh words written months before the Nazi German invasion of Poland, which began on 1 September 1939, remains Gandhi's most critical statement of the Nazism and its policies towards the Jews. As result of German aggression and occupation, Jews in thousands were quarantined in ghettos, deported to and incarcerated in labour camps spread across central Europe and eventually dehumanized, killed, gassed and cremated in millions. The international community did not know the magnitude of the Jewish tragedy until the liberation of the Auschwitz by the Russian army on 27 January 1945. Unfortunately, neither Gandhi nor the Congress leadership made any statement on the Holocaust; this could be partly due to their domestic preoccupation with India's freedom but largely due to its possible repercussions upon their position vis-à-vis Palestine (Kumaraswamy, 2000). Even Gandhi could not have imagined that the Jewish refugees should go back to their 'homes' in Germany and other places, which were under Nazi reign of terror.

The unfolding Nazi treatment of the Jews brought a momentary impulse in Gandhi to say, *If there ever could be a justifiable war in the name of and for humanity, a war against Germany, to prevent the wanton persecution of a whole race, would be completely justified*. The Allied forces not attacking Auschwitz and bombing railroads leading up to the concentration camps continue to be controversial. President Harry S. Truman who ordered the dropping of nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki to bring an early end to the War in the Pacific was not prepared to use the same option for central Europe. One could speculate if similar actions could have saved thousands of lives.

However, Gandhi was quick to dispel war as an option even against Hitler and says, *I do not believe in any war. A discussion of the pros and cons of such a war is therefore outside my horizon or province*. In later years, especially even after the end of the Second World War Gandhi was comparing 'Hitlerism with Churchillism' and arguing that there was no difference between the two (CWMG, 75, p. 10). For example, speaking in October 1941, he observed: 'Hitlerism and Churchillism are, in fact, the same thing. The difference is only one of degree' (CWMG, 75, p. 10). On another occasion, he remarked: 'I can have no hatred even for Adolf Hitler' (CWMG, 75, p. 272). One could, therefore, suggest that

even against Hitler, Gandhi was not prepared to use violence as an option and was adhering to his absolutist commitment to non-violence. However, this became problematic when we discuss the later parts of the *Harijan* article which exposes his duality vis-à-vis violence in Palestine.

If war against Germany even when such crimes were committed against the Jews were not an option, *surely there can be no alliance with Germany* either. Gandhi's opposition to collaboration with Nazi Germany proved problematic in the light of some of the later developments in the Indian nationalist movement. For him, however, the issue was square and simple. *How can there be an alliance between a nation, which claims to stand for justice and democracy, and one, which is the declared enemy of both?* Highlighting the same demands that the nationalists made vis-à-vis London, Gandhi asks: *Or is England drifting towards armed dictatorship and all it means?*

The refusal of Britain to include India in its fight for 'justice and democracy' resulted in the Congress party not willing to be a party to the war coalition against Hitler. This was in contrast to the position of the Zionist leadership in the wake of the MacDonald White Paper of 1939 whereby Britain distanced itself from the Balfour Declaration. Caught between the war clouds in Europe and British renunciation of its support for the Jewish homeland, the Jewish leadership in Palestine came out with 'We will fight with the British against Hitler, as if there was no (McDonald) White Paper; we will fight the (McDonald) White Paper as if there was no war (against Hitler)' (Ben-Gurion, 1971, p. 54).¹ Afraid of the nationalist movement getting out of control or worse gravitating towards anti-British violence, the Congress party kept away from both the warring parties. The incarceration of its senior leaders including, Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Congress President Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and the banning of political activities of the Congress party, made things worse.

Even in November 1938, he derided the brutality of the Nazi war machine. *Germany is showing to the world how efficiently violence can be worked when it is not hampered by any hypocrisy or weakness masquerading as humanitarianism. It is also showing how hideous, terrible and terrifying it looks in its nakedness.* Gandhi's recognition of the *Banality of Evil* as Hannah Arendt chose to depict later on, was in contrast to his advice to them in the following paragraph.

Is it possible for the Jews to resist this organized and shameless persecution? Is there a way to preserve their self-respect and not to feel helpless, neglected and forlorn? Gandhi feels there is and in the process exhibits not only his naivety but also his insensitivity. The religious persona of him leads to believe that *No person who has faith in a living God need feel helpless or forlorn. Jehovah of the Jews is a God more personal than the God of the Christians, the Mussalmans or the Hindus, though, as matter of fact in essence, He is common to all and one without a second and beyond description.* Here, he recognizes the common historical roots Abrahamic faiths, namely, Judaism, Christianity and Islamic and their monotheistic legacy. Since the *Jews attribute personality to God and believe that He rules every action of theirs*, he counsels, *they ought not to feel helpless.*

If advice was directed at the Jews not their persecutors, he recommended a course of action that was unsympathetic and inconsiderate. *If I were a Jew and*

were born in Germany and earned my livelihood there, he claims, *I would claim Germany as my home even as the tallest gentile German may, and challenge him to shoot me or cast me in the dungeon; I would refuse to be expelled or to submit to discriminating treatment.* This exposed Gandhi's unfamiliarity with Nazi Germany, wishful thinking or his over simplification of the Nazi evil. Suggesting non-violence as the option, he declares, *I should not wait for the fellow Jews to join me in civil resistance but would have the confidence that in the end the rest are bound to follow my example.* The successes in his *satyagraha* made him to trivialize the Nazi Germany and to feel that his experiences can be and should be replicated by the German Jews.

This is where Gandhi loses the sense of proportion and makes an uneven parallel between Nazism and British imperialism. Despite all its colonial designs, exploitations, brutality and violence, there was an inherent civility in British rule. It was amenable to reason, most often measured in its responses, less lethal while dealing with the protesters and was sensitive to criticisms. The behaviour of other colonial rules, occupations or handling of protests and dissent has been far worse in November 1938 as well as in subsequent years. He was naïve in thinking that Nazi Germany was no better than the British imperialism, which incarcerated him and other nationalist leaders but kept them alive until 1947.

His prescription for Jewish non-violence was nothing less than a recommendation for collective suicide. *If one Jew or all the Jews were to accept the prescription here offered* (i.e., of non-violence), *he or they cannot be worse off than now.* Hitler, however, proved Gandhi horribly wrong. Between 1939 and 1945, thousands of Jews in Germany and German-occupied Central and Eastern Europe were removed from their homes, taken to ghettos and when these became overcrowded they were marched to labour camps and were dehumanized and disposed of their self and dignity. Eventually six million of them were killed, shot, gassed or incinerated in the 13 major camps that the Nazi had established in Central and Eastern Europe. Even Gandhi who abhorred Hitler could not have anticipated such a catastrophe that fell upon the Jews but his post-1945 silence on the holocaust was deafening, eerie and incomprehensible.

Proposing 'suffering' as a solution to the Jewish tragedy in Nazi Germany, Gandhi suggests, *suffering voluntarily undergone will bring them an inner strength and joy which no number of resolutions of sympathy passed in the world outside Germany can.* Advocating 'restraint' as the option, he observes, *if Britain, France and America were to declare hostilities against Germany, they can bring no inner joy, no inner strength.* Gandhi found a convoluted logic to rule out War as an option against Nazism *as calculated violence of Hitler may even result in a general massacre of Jews by way of his answer to the declaration of such hostilities* by the allied forces. Fortunately, the Allied power did not listen to Gandhi's council and Churchill propelled and led the alliance against the Nazi Germany and hastened its demise. While individuals could consider moral values supreme to the point of their deaths, nations do not have the luxury of mass suicide in the name of principles. As Bernard Lewis aptly reminded, despite the heroism and sacrifice, Masada left only a memory and no Jewish survivors.

Gandhi primarily viewed Judaism through Christianity and its blinkers and reflecting the Christian doctrine of suffering he feels, *if the Jewish mind could be prepared for voluntary suffering, even the massacre I have imagined could be turned into a day of thanksgiving and joy that Jehovah had wrought deliverance of the race even at the hands of the tyrant. For the god fearing, death has no terror. It is a joyful sleep to be followed by a waking that would be all the more refreshing for the long sleep.* This is nothing short of a prescription for a national suicide. Indeed, while Zionism was seeking an end to centuries of suffering and subjugation, Gandhi was advising them to solve their problems through national suicide. Despite the war efforts, nearly a third of global Jewish population, including much of its European component perished in the Holocaust. Moreover, even Gandhi's India did not follow this counsel after independence and he came to recognize and accept the state monopoly of force and its use over Kashmir. If one were to extend the logic, it is impossible to justify the means adopted by Palestinian national movements in defence of their rights. If he advocated Jewish non-violence even against Hitler, it would be impossible for Mahatma Gandhi to defend, let alone justify the Fedayeen attacks against Israeli occupation.

Somehow, Gandhi felt that *it is easier for the Jews than the Czechs* to follow his 'prescription' of *ahimsa*. One does not know why and how he makes such claims. Then he goes on to draw a parallel between the plight of Indians in South Africa and Jews in Nazi Germany and for him, there was *an exact parallel*. In what can only be described as superficial and inaccurate, he says *the Indians occupied precisely the same place that the Jews occupy in Germany*.

This was a gross simplification of complex and contrasting realities. Nazi Germany and subsequent areas, which came under the Nazi rule, were anything akin to South Africa. Despite a host of social and political restrictions, Indians were at least second-class citizens but this was not the case for Jews in the Nazifying Europe. They were arrested and deported in thousands, deprived of all their possession and dignity, dehumanized before being executed in masses. Indeed, coming days after the *Kristallnacht*, Gandhi's comparison could only be described as insensitive and inconsiderate.

Gandhi, however, was not wrong in stating that both persecutions *had also a religious tinge*. He reminds that Paul Kruger who was the president of South Africa during 1883–1900 when Gandhi began in satyagraha *used to say that the white Christians were the chosen of God and Indians were inferior beings created to serve the whites. A fundamental clause in the Transvaal constitution was that there should be no equality between the whites and collared races including Asiatics*. Gandhi understood the Jews being 'a chosen people' along similar lines and elsewhere faulted them for bringing miseries upon themselves. Earlier he observed that because of such claims, 'their descendants were visited with strange and even unjust retribution' (CWMG, 39, p. 230).

According to Gandhi, even in South Africa, *Indians were consigned to ghettos described as locations*. For him, *the other disabilities were almost of the same type as those of the Jews in Germany*. This is akin to suggesting that life and death are 'almost similar'. He chooses to ignore the differences or refuses to

address them in later years. In South Africa, 'locations' were the final destinations for the oppressed but for Nazi Germany ghettos were the first step towards the long march of Jewish annihilation. Even after criticisms from Zionist personalities such as Buber, Greenberg and Magnes, Gandhi never re-examined his superficial comparisons between the plight of the Indians in South Africa and Jews in Germany.

He then lists out his accomplishment in South Africa. *The Indians, a mere handful, resorted to satyagraha without any backing from the world outside or the Indian government. Indeed, the British officials tried to dissuade the satyagrahis from their contemplated step. World opinion and the Indian government came to their aid after eight years of fighting. And that too was by way of diplomatic pressure and not of a threat of War.* Although important, Gandhi was facing a more benevolent oppressor than the Jews.

Holding on to his logic of satyagraha, he argues that the Jews of Germany were *under infinitely better auspices than the Indians of South Africa*. He came to this conclusion because they were *a compact, homogeneous community in Germany*. One could add that they lived in Germany for longer than the Indians in South Africa who were largely brought in as indentured labourers in the early nineteenth century. There are two problems in this argument; even in 1938, Gandhi recognizes the enormous nature of the challenges facing Jews in Nazi Germany and with the onset of the Second World War, more areas came under Nazi control and this brought about the heterogeneity of the Jewish population.

Gandhi goes on to say that, *the Jews are far more gifted than the Indians of South Africa. And they have organized world opinion behind them*. Since the beginning of the year, Central and Western European countries were debating ways of handling the outpouring of Jewish refugees fleeing Hitler's Germany. Leaders like Churchill took the lead in organizing the alliance, which was partly aimed at mitigating the plight of the Jews. It is highly debatable if a diplomatic option would have led to Hitler reversing his dreadful path. Moreover, as subsequent events proved, not only the allied efforts took time to succeed but also came at the cost of a third of the world's Jewish population perishing in the Holocaust.

Then, calling for the emergence of a Jewish Gandhi in Germany, he feels convinced that *if someone with courage and vision can arise among them* (i.e., the German Jews) *to lead them in non-violent action, the winter of their despair can in the twinkling of an eye be turned into the summer of hope*. This he suggests could turn *a degrading manhunt ... into a calm and determined stand offered by unarmed men and women possessing the strength of suffering given to them by Jehovah*. Such a course he believes, *would be a truly religious resistance ... against the godless fury of dehumanized man*. Through this non-violent struggle, he believes, *the German Jews will score a lasting victory over the German gentiles in the sense that they will have converted the latter to an appreciation of human dignity*. As one of his Jewish critics pointed out, a Jewish Gandhi in Germany would not be incarcerated but be directly taken to the guillotine (CWMG, 69, p. 290). He was unable to differentiate the oppression of British imperialism from the evils of Nazism. In later years, he continued to believe that one was not

better than the other and Hitlerism could 'never be defeated by counter-Hitlerism' (CWMG, 72, p. 187).

His inane belief in non-violence led him to suggest that through *satyagraha*, *the German Jews will score a lasting victory over the German gentiles in the sense that they will have converted the latter to an appreciation of human dignity*. Such a course, he feels, would have been a yeoman service to the Germans and would prove their *title to be real Germans as against who are today dragging, however unknowingly, the German name into the mire*. Beside Oscar Schindler, the Nazi era witnessed scores of faceless men and women who at grave personal risks protected, saved and facilitated the escape of scores of Jews. At the same time, a significant segment of the population in the Nazi-held areas actively collaborated in the perpetuation of the oppression of the Jews. The post-War Nuremburg trial only targeted the high echelons of the Nazi leadership and scores of others were either never brought to justice or escaped from Europe.

Indeed, Polish-Jewish educator Janusz Korczak—also known as Henryk Goldzmit—symbolized the fate of Jewish ahimsa against the Nazis. He refused to accept his personal freedom when he accompanied 192 children in his orphanage to Warsaw Ghetto in early 1942 and eventually chose to die with them in the Treblinka extermination camp in August that year. Unfortunately, for Gandhi, such self-sacrifices on the part of Jews proved to be insufficient to prove their credentials as full Germans.

Then Gandhi offers a piece of advice to *the Jews in Palestine*. It was clear to him that *they are going ... the wrong way*. He questions both the Zionist claims to and modes operandi and describes Palestine as *the biblical conception and not a geographical tract*. He went on to suggest, *Palestine is in their hearts*. While this has been his position even in the past and he has been suggesting that, it is still a spiritual concept devoid of any territorial dimension. However, he adopted a diametrically opposite position when it comes to Islamic claims to Palestine. During the Khilafat struggle, he defined Palestine as a concrete geographical tract. Depicting it within the expanded Islamic canvas of *Jazirat-ul-Arab*, he not only sought exclusive Muslim control over it but also categorically ruled out Jews or Christians acquiring political rights or sovereignty. Indeed, it was supposed to be an abstract 'spiritual' entity for the Jews but a tangible geographical reality with political control for the Muslims. Indeed, he never urged the Muslims of India that Palestine was in their 'hearts'.

Viewing Zionism merely as religious struggle, he argues that if the Jews *must look to the Palestine of geography as their national home, it is wrong to enter it under the shadow of British gun*. This was the only occasion he used 'nation' in the Jewish context. Otherwise, he merely saw them as followers of a different religion. Here, his primary concern was means adopted by the Jews in realizing their objectives in Palestine. Having urged them to resist Hitler through non-violence, Gandhi could not have endorsed the Zionist policies in Palestine, especially mass migration. Hence, he argues, *A religious act of establishing of a Jewish national home cannot be performed with the aid of the bayonet or the bomb*. On the contrary, he advised them to *settle in Palestine only by the goodwill of the Arabs*.

At the same time, Gandhi recognized the vehement Arab opposition to the twin-challenges posed by the Zionist project, namely, immigration and land purchase and hence urges them to work *to convert the Arab hearts*. Recognizing the monolithic nature of the both, the faiths that *the same God rules the Arab heart who rules the Jewish heart* remains true. Therefore, the latter *can offer satyagraha in front of the Arabs and offer themselves to be shot or thrown into the Dead Sea without raising a little finger against them*. As Gandhi would recognize in the following paragraph, it is highly debatable if *ahimsa* would be an effective strategy in Palestine. Clinging on his faith-oriented understanding of Zionism, he feels that if the Jews were to pursue *ahimsa* in realizing their goals, *the world opinion* would be *in their favour in their religious aspiration*.

According to Gandhi, there *are hundreds of ways of reasoning with the Arabs if only the Jews discard the help of the British bayonet*. Then he delivers a strong indictment and says, the Jews are *co-sharers with the British in despoiling people who have done no wrong to them*. This became a powerful argument after 1948, when the Western support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine was seen as the answer and remedy for the prolonged European mistreatment of Jews, especially the Holocaust.

However, Gandhi's criticisms of Jewish reliance of *British bayonet* could not be divorced from the evolving political context within the country. The Haripura Session of the Congress party met in February 1938 a few months before Gandhi's *Harijan* article in which Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose was elected president. Its resolution on Palestine criticized the British for trying to impose partition 'in the teeth of opposition of the Arabs' and appealed 'to the Jews not to seek the shelter of the British Mandatory and not to allow themselves to be exploited in the interests of British imperialism' (Zaidi, 1985, p. 49).

Interestingly, Bose and his followers could not adhere to same counsel against collaborating with imperialism. Breaking away from the mainstream nationalism, Bose actively sought the help of Japanese imperialism and Nazism to overthrow the British in India and met senior officials of both these powers including Adolf Hitler. Gandhi's advice against collaborating with imperialism was valid not only for the Jews in Palestine but also Bose and his followers in India. Not surprisingly, since his 'disappearance' in the closing stages of the Second World War, Bose has become a cult figure in the country and not many are prepared to examine his wartime records, especially his 'collaboration' with Japanese imperialism and Nazism. Not just the Congress party and post-1947 Indian leadership but also scholars on Gandhi carefully avoid this duality. Those who cite Gandhi's disapproval of Jewish collaboration with imperialism as the powerful incentive for his opposition to Jewish homeland project in Palestine rarely comment on Bose's track record. Thus, Gandhi's counsel was valid for the Jewish designs in Palestine but a political dynamite to be avoided within the Indian context.

Likewise, his suggestion that there *are hundreds of ways of reasoning with the Arabs* was equally valid for the Congress party and its handling of the partition issue with the Muslim League. Under the leadership of Nehru, the Congress party accepted the Mountbatten Plan that partitioned the British India along communal lines but this was not Gandhi's option. The Congress party, as well as Indian elite,

found Gandhi's advocacy for accommodation valid for Palestine but not for the subcontinent. This was equally true for scholars to delink his identical position vis-à-vis partitions of India and Palestine. On the issue of not collaborating with imperialism and an accommodative settlement, Gandhi was more consistent than the political leadership and scholars in India.

However, the Achilles' heels of the *Harijan* articles come in the penultimate paragraph. Having advocated Jewish non-violence even against Hitler and in Palestine, Gandhi recognizes and tacitly endorses Arab violence. It begins with a caveat that he was *not defending the Arab excesses*. This was about the widespread violence in Palestine in the wake of the Arab Revolt, which began in early 1936. Infuriated by the British connivance in Jewish immigration and land purchases, the Arabs led by Haji Amin al-Husseini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem launched a popular protest that continued until the outbreak of the Second World War. While the mandatory power was responsible for the deaths of most of the Arabs, the latter were held responsible for most of the Jewish deaths in this period.

Aware of the ground realities, Gandhi wished the Arabs *had chosen the way of non-violence in resisting what they rightly regarded as an unwarranted encroachment upon their country*. Only a few paragraphs earlier, he unequivocally advocated Jewish non-violence against Hitler, against whom, he suggests a war could be a justifiable option. The Zionist homeland project was a catastrophe for the Arabs of Palestine but Jews under German rule was facing a far serious challenge of individual survival. In other words, the plight of Jews in Europe was far worse than 'unwarranted encroachment' that the Arabs were facing Palestine. Yet, Gandhi's advocacy for non-violence was directed only against the Jews but not against the Arabs of Palestine. This was where Gandhi falters considerably.

Why was he unable to demand Arab satyagraha against Zionism? Was it because of his limited personal contacts with the Arabs of Palestine? Was he aware that his advice for ahimsa would be ignored by the Arabs? Alternatively, was it because the Jews both in Hitler's Europe and Arab Palestine would be more amenable to his counsel than Arabs as B. R. Nanda (1989) suggests? One could only speculate the answers. However, him not demanding Arab non-violence to achieve their goals vis-à-vis Zionism was not an aberration and during the Khilafat phase, Gandhi adopted a similar approach; the Khilafat leaders practising non-violence did not accompany his support for the pan-Islamic cause.

Non-content with his understanding approach towards Arab violence, he declares, *according to the accepted canons of right and wrong, nothing can be said against the Arab resistance in the face of overwhelming odds*. Gandhi, the Mahatma, however, was unable to see the European situation on the eve of the Second World War on similar lines. If one were to take this statement at its face value, the European Jewry was not facing *overwhelming odds* against Hitler. In trying to empathize with the Arabs of Palestine, Gandhi trivializes the European situation on the eve of the War, condones Arab violence, and in the process exposes his duality on ahimsa. In short, when it comes to ahimsa—the core principal that differentiated him from other mortals—even Mahatma Gandhi was inconsistent, unfair and in the process falters. In the last paragraph, he repeats his

earlier position of non-violence and urges them to accept *every country their home, including Palestine, not by aggression but by loving service.*

Conclusion

The *Harijan* article exposes not only Mahatma Gandhi's limited understanding of the Jewish religion and history but also his inability to comprehend Zionism. However, Gandhi's most serious folly has to be located in his demand for Jewish non-violence. He demands absolute ahimsa against Hitler and in Palestine and was not prepared to accept their collaboration with the British in realizing their homeland aspirations. Gandhi, however, did not make the same demand for Arab non-violence in Palestine and a section of Congress party abandoned Gandhi's counsel against collaborating with colonialism and sided with Japanese imperialism and Nazism. Not just Gandhi but those venerate his 'consistent' opposition to Zionism, carefully avoid not only Gandhi's duality over Arab violence but also do not contextualize Bose's Nazi-imperial linkages.

Appendix

The full text of *The Jews* published in the 26 November 1938 issue of *Harijan* (CWMG, 68, pp. 137–141).

Several letters have been received by me asking me to declare my views about the Arab–Jew question in Palestine and the persecution of the Jews in Germany. It is not without hesitation that I venture to offer my views on this very difficult question.

My sympathies are all with the Jews. I have known them intimately in South Africa. Some of them became life-long companions. Through these friends I came to learn much of their age-long persecution. They have been the untouchables of Christianity. The parallel between their treatment by Christians and the treatment of untouchables by Hindus is very close. Religious sanction has been invoked in both cases for the justification of the inhuman treatment meted out to them. Apart from the friendships, therefore, there is the more common universal reason for my sympathy for the Jews.

But my sympathy does not blind me to the requirements of justice. The cry for the national home for the Jews does not make much appeal to me. The sanction for it is sought in the Bible and the tenacity with which the Jews have hankered after return to Palestine. Why should they not, like other peoples of the earth, make that country their home where they are born and where they earn their livelihood?

Palestine belongs to the Arabs in the same sense that England belongs to the English or France to the French. It is wrong and inhuman to impose the Jews on the Arabs. What is going on in Palestine today cannot be justified by any moral code of conduct. The mandates have no sanction but that of the last war. Surely, it would be a crime against humanity to reduce the proud Arabs so that Palestine can be restored to the Jews partly or wholly as their national home.

The nobler course would be to insist on a just treatment of the Jews wherever they are born and bred. The Jews born in France are French in precisely the same sense that

Christians born in France are French. If the Jews have no home but Palestine, will they relish the idea of being forced to leave the other parts of the world in which they are settled? Or do they want a double home where they can remain at will? This cry for the national home affords a colourable justification for the German expulsion of the Jews.

But the German persecution of the Jews seems to have no parallel in history. The tyrants of old never went so mad as Hitler seems to have gone. And he is doing it with religious zeal. For he is propounding a new religion of exclusive and militant nationalism in the name of which any inhumanity becomes an act of humanity to be rewarded here and hereafter. The crime of an obviously mad but intrepid youth is being visited upon his whole race with unbelievable ferocity. If there ever could be a justifiable war in the name of and for humanity, a war against Germany, to prevent the wanton persecution of a whole race, would be completely justified. But I do not believe in any war. A discussion of the pros and cons of such a war is therefore outside my horizon or province.

But if there can be no war against Germany, even for such a crime as is being committed against the Jews, surely there can be no alliance with Germany. How can there be an alliance between a nation which claims to stand for justice and democracy and one which is the declared enemy of both? Or is England drifting towards armed dictatorship and all it means?

Germany is showing to the world how efficiently violence can be worked when it is not hampered by any hypocrisy or weakness masquerading as humanitarianism. It is also showing how hideous, terrible and terrifying it looks in its nakedness.

Can the Jews resist this organized and shameless persecution? Is there a way to preserve their self-respect, and not to feel helpless, neglected and forlorn? I submit there is. No person who has faith in a living God need feel helpless or forlorn. Jehovah of the Jews is a God more personal than the God of the Christians, the Mussalmans or the Hindus, though, as a matter of fact in essence, He is common to all and one without a second and beyond description. But as the Jews attribute personality to God and believe that He rules every action of theirs, they ought not to feel helpless. If I were a Jew and were born in Germany and earned my livelihood there, I would claim Germany as my home even as the tallest gentile German may, and challenge him to shoot me or cast me in the dungeon; I would refuse to be expelled or to submit to discriminating treatment. And for doing this, I should not wait for the fellow Jews to join me in civil resistance but would have confidence that in the end the rest are bound to follow my example. If one Jew or all the Jews were to accept the prescription here offered, he or they cannot be worse off than now. And suffering voluntarily undergone will bring them an inner strength and joy which no number of resolutions of sympathy passed in the world outside Germany can. Indeed, even if Britain, France and America were to declare hostilities against Germany, they can bring no inner joy, no inner strength. The calculated violence of Hitler may even result in a general massacre of the Jews by way of his first answer to the declaration of such hostilities. But if the Jewish mind could be prepared for voluntary suffering, even the massacre I have imagined could be turned into a day of thanksgiving and joy that Jehovah had wrought deliverance of the race even at the hands of the tyrant. For to the god fearing, death has no terror. It is a joyful sleep to be followed by a waking that would be all the more refreshing for the long sleep.

It is hardly necessary for me to point out that it is easier for the Jews than for the Czechs to follow my prescription. And they have in the Indian satyagraha campaign in South Africa an exact parallel. There the Indians occupied precisely the same place that the Jews occupy in Germany. The persecution had also a religious tinge. President Kruger used to say that the white Christians were the chosen of God and Indians were inferior beings created to serve the whites. A fundamental clause in the Transvaal constitution was that there should

be no equality between the whites and coloured races including Asiatics. There too the Indians were consigned to ghettos described as locations. The other disabilities were almost of the same type as those of the Jews in Germany. The Indians, a mere handful, resorted to satyagraha without any backing from the world outside or the Indian government. Indeed, the British officials tried to dissuade the satyagrahis from their contemplated step. World opinion and the Indian government came to their aid after eight years of fighting. And that too was by way of diplomatic pressure not of a threat of war.

But the Jews of Germany can offer satyagraha under infinitely better auspices than the Indians of South Africa. The Jews are a compact, homogeneous community in Germany. They are far more gifted than the Indians of South Africa. And they have organized world opinion behind them. I am convinced that if someone with courage and vision can arise among them to lead them in non-violent action, the winter of their despair can in the twinkling of an eye be turned into the summer of hope. And what has today become a degrading manhunt can be turned into a calm and determined stand offered by unarmed men and women possessing the strength of suffering given to them by Jehovah. It will be then a truly religious resistance offered against the godless fury of dehumanized man. The German Jews will score a lasting victory over the German gentiles in the sense that they will have converted the latter to an appreciation of human dignity. They will have rendered service to fellow Germans and proved their title to be the real Germans as against those who are today dragging, however unknowingly, the German name into the mire.

And now a word to the Jews in Palestine. I have no doubt that they are going about it the wrong way. The Palestine of the Biblical conception is not a geographical tract. It is in their hearts. But if they must look to the Palestine of geography as their national home, it is wrong to enter it under the shadow of the British gun. A religious act cannot be performed with the aid of the bayonet or the bomb. They can settle in Palestine only by the goodwill of the Arabs. They should seek to convert the Arab heart. The same God rules the Arab heart who rules the Jewish heart. They can offer satyagraha in front of the Arabs and offer themselves to be shot or thrown into the Dead Sea without raising a little finger against them. They will find the world opinion in their favour in their religious aspiration. There are hundreds of ways of reasoning with the Arabs, if they will only discard the help of the British bayonet. As it is, they are co-sharers with the British in despoiling a people who have done no wrong to them.

I am not defending the Arab excesses. I wish they had chosen the way of non-violence in resisting what they rightly regarded as an unwarrantable encroachment upon their country. But according to the accepted canons of right and wrong, nothing can be said against the Arab resistance in the face of overwhelming odds.

Let the Jews who claim to be the chosen race prove their title by choosing the way of non-violence for vindicating their position on earth. Every country is their home including Palestine not by aggression but by loving service. A Jewish friend has sent me a book called *The Jewish Contribution to Civilization* by Cecil Roth. It gives a record of what the Jews have done to enrich the world's literature, art, music, drama, science, medicine, agriculture, etc. Given the will, the Jew can refuse to be treated as the outcaste of the West, to be despised or patronized. He can command the attention and respect of the world by being man, the chosen creation of God, instead of being man who is fast sinking to the brute and forsaken by God. They can add to their many contributions the surpassing contribution of non-violent action.

SEGAON, 20 November 1938
(CWMG, vol. 68, pp.137–141)

Note

1. This was akin to the position of the Left parties in India towards the UPA government headed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh during 2004–2009. While supporting the Congress-led government in New Delhi against the BJP-led opposition, the Left parties were fighting with the same Congress party in their bastions, namely, West Bengal and Kerala.

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